

HISTORY
OF
LEBANON CONFERENCE,
OF THE EAST PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD.

REV. E. S. HENRY.

(One of the original members of the Conference.)

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HARRISBURG, PENN'A.

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THE HISTORY OF LEBANON CONFERENCE.

About the year 1850, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of East Pennsylvania was divided into four conference districts. These were the Susquehanna, the Lebanon, the Philadelphia and the Easton Conferences. The Susquehanna Conference has since formed itself into a regular District Synod, in the General Synod of the United States of America; numbering, 37 ministers, 52 congregations and 5,350 communicants.

The Philadelphia and Easton Conferences were, by permission of Synod, united years ago. But even united they failed, for years, to have any regular meetings. A number of congregations and much territory belonging to the Synod of East Pennsylvania were thus lost for the want of missionary care and attention. For a few years this united conference has been having regular meetings, provoked no doubt to the performance of its duty by the good example of the wide-awake Lebanon Conference.

This Conference, from a very small beginning, kept on meeting regularly, every three months, and grew steadily, until now a division is thought necessary, and

for the best interests of the church by a majority of the members of the Synod.

The Lebanon Conference, since its organization, has never passed a single triannual meeting. When it was first formed by the Synod, there were only four pastorates within its bounds, viz; Pottsville, Lebanon, Reading and Womelsdorf. These reported 838 communicants. There were conference meetings held during the first years after its formation, but, unfortunately, we have no record of them. In the minutes of the Synod held at Lebanon, in September, 1855, we find the following on page 9; "The Secretary of the Susquehanna Conference presented the annual report of that body. It was received, and laid on the table for future action. It was resolved, That we hear verbal statements from the secretaries of the other conference districts of Synod. Such statements were accordingly made on behalf of the Lebanon and Phil'a Conferences."

Bro. Dietzler remembers meetings held in Berks county, on missionary grounds, before my connection with the Synod. And I can recall a meeting at Schaefferstown and one at Pine Grove, of which we have no record. There used to be only two or three members present at these earlier meetings. The convenience for travel was not as good then as now.

The first conference meeting of which we have recorded minutes, was held at Middletown, Dauphin county, on the 3rd. day of December, 1855, which was just 22 years ago.

This Conference was permanently organized at that time

by the adoption of a Constitution and By-Laws. There were five clerical members present. The Rev. D. Steck was elected President, Rev. A. C. Wedekind was elected Secretary, Rev. B. Sadtler was the Pastor loci, and the present Treasurer was also the first Treasurer of this Conference. There were at that time, in December, 1855, eight charges within the bounds of the Lebanon Conference,— four in Schuylkill county, two in Berks county, one in Lebanon and one in Dauphin county. These charges reported 2,213 communicants. The roll consisted then of the following names; — Revs. J. A. Brown, D. Steck, A. C. Wedekind, J. M. Dietzler, E. S. Henry, A. Wieting, J. E. Graeff, Jacob Steck, W. Porr, P. Bergstresser and J. Grim. Three of these brethren were without charges.

In 1857, twenty years ago, the Lebanon Conference consisted of the following clerical members; — Revs. J. A. Brown, D. Steck, A. C. Wedekind, S. Yingling, E. S. Henry, A. Wieting, J. E. Graeff, J. Grim, C. J. Ehrehart, C. A. Hay, J. M. Dietzler and J. J. Weber: = 17 members.

Ten years later, in the year 1867, the roll of the Lebanon Conference contained the following clerical names;— Revs. P. Reiser, D. P. Rosenmiller, C. Riemensnyder, J. M. Dietzler, G. J. Martz, J. R. Focht, P. Raby, E. S. Henry, G. F. Stelling, M. Rhodes, W. V. Gotwalt, M. Fernsler, H. C. Shindle, G. W. Haldeman, W. H. Steck, M. Harpel, P. Willard, C. A. Hay, F. A. Barnitz, C. J. Ehrehart, M. Valentine, J. J. Weber, U. Graves, J. R. Sykes, J. C. Burkhalter, A. Yeiser, S. J. Berlin, W. H.

Hamma, J. G. Breininger; = 29 clerical members. There were 22 charges in the Conference then, and these reported 4,579 communicant members.

December 10th., 1877, ten years later, we meet for the last time in this place. Our roll contains, at present, the following clerical names;—Revs. Joel Swartz, F. A. Barnitz, E. S. Brownmiller, T. W. Staley, W. I. Cutter, E. Daron, S. Dasher, J. M. Dietzler, J. R. Dimm, M. Fernsler, J. W. Finkbiner, C. A. Hay, L. M. Heilman, E. S. Henry, O. D. Marcley, G. J. Martz, J. Q. McAtee, W. G. Mennig, J. Peter, W. S. Porr, C. Riemensnyder, J. F. Reinmund, D. P. Rosenmiller, J. M. Steck, J. J. Weber, P. Willard, R. W. Hufford, C. E. Hay, H. L. Dox, J. V. Eckert, J. A. Singmaster, J. A. Wert, T. C. Billheimer, M. Harpel, C. L. Ehrenfeld=thirty-five clerical members. There are 30 pastoral districts in the Conference. The communicants reported in these charges are 8,023. At the formation of the Conference there were 838 communicants and four charges, now there are 8,023 communicants and thirty pastoral charges.

Special meetings were held at every annual meeting of Synod during the last twenty-two years. But in each year since its organization three regular meetings of the Conference were held. We met every three months, by counting in the meetings of Synod, when special meetings were held. In the year 1856, regular meetings were held at Tamaqua, Womelsdorf and Pottsville.

In 1857, at Pine Grove, Minersville and Palmyra.

In 1858, at Harrisburg, Middleport and Orwigsburg.

In 1859, at Womelsdorf, Middletown and Ashland.
In 1860, at Columbia, Pine Grove and Hummelstown.
In 1861, at Annville, Schuylkill Haven and Pottsville.
In 1862, at Schaefferstown, Harrisburg and Lebanon.
In 1863, at Middletown, Pine Grove and Schuylkill Haven.
In 1864, at Hummelstown, Millersburg and Minersville.
In 1865, at Lancaster, Mahanoy City and Union Deposit.
In 1866, at Schuylkill Haven, Ashland and Columbia.
In 1867, at Reading, Lykenstown and Petersburg.
In 1868, at Annville, Hummelstown and Pine Grove.
In 1869, at Dauphin, Tremont and Maytown.
In 1870, at Myerstown, Schuylkill Haven and Millersburg.
In 1871, at Minersville, Pottsville and Reading.
In 1872, at Pine Grove, Mahanoy City and Manheim.
In 1873, at Lebanon, New Haven and Mohrsville.
In 1874, at Tremont, Berrysburg and Harrisburg.
In 1875, at Lancaster, Middletown and Annville.
In 1876, at Allentown, Hummelstown and Schuylkill Haven.
In 1877, at Harrisburg, Fisherville and Union Deposit.

This Conference since its organization has met in thirty-four different places. In Schuylkill county there were nine meeting places, in Dauphin county nine, in Lancaster county six, in Lebanon county six, in Berks county three, and in Lehigh county one. At a meeting in December, 1856, efforts were already made to divide the Lebanon Conference into a Northern and a Southern District. Each of these would have had six pastors. This resolution was postponed from meeting to meeting and finally voted down.

The Lebanon Conference, during its whole history, faithfully attended to its work as it is laid down in the formula of Government and in its own Constitution. The object of this Conference was; 1, The earnest practical preaching of the Word; 2, Mutual counsel and deliberation with reference to the Redeemed Kingdom; 3, Provision for the waste places within our bounds. How well and carefully the Lebanon Conference has attended to the work it undertook to do, its two large volumes of minutes do amply prove.

A great part of the territory of this conference was missionary ground, and the members labored faithfully in this department of the Master's Vineyard. From the very beginning, a great part of the minutes is headed with the expressive words, "Missionary Business." Some congregations came over to us from the Synod of Penn'a; but more than half the number of our congregations are the fruits of our missionary efforts. The Lebanon Conference had its territory originally mapped off, so that all the members could soon become familiar with every locality where there were prospects of establishing churches. Quite a number of enterprises started by the Lebanon Conference are now served by, and in connection with, the Synod of Pennsylvania. But there are fully as many congregations with us that were formerly in connection with the Synod of Pennsylvania. This Conference employed, for years, exploring missionaries. Rev. J. F. Bayer, of the Pennsylvania Synod, Rev. J. B. Keller, of Williamsport, Md. and Rev. J. D. Scheck, deceased, were all

engaged in this noble work for the Conference. These brethren labored with great success. The congregation at Mt. Carmel was established in this way. It is now one of the flourishing charges in the Susquehanna Synod. In this way two very successful congregations were established at Ashland. As early as 1857, Bros. Weber and Porr were, by resolution of Conference, requested to visit Ashland and contiguous points for the purpose of organizing congregations. In June, 1857, Bro. Weber reported to Conference that he had visited Ashland and preached twice in a school-house, and that the prospects for establishing a church there were good. In 1858, this Conference sent a committee of seven to explore that new part of the coal field. This committee, on their return, recommended that two churches, one English and the other German, should be immediately established in that new town. Two fine churches and parsonages are the result of the labors of the Lebanon Conference at that place. About that time Tremont and Schuylkill Haven were carefully looked after as missionary points. Churches and pastors are in each of those towns to-day. In 1862, a church lot was secured in Mahanoy City by this Conference as had been done in other places before. The success that has attended our efforts in that flourishing town, are well known to the brethren. Nearly two thousand dollars were raised by the Lebanon Conference, and spent exclusively on its own territory for mission purposes. The missionary efforts of Lebanon Conference have been fully as successful, if not more so, than any similar efforts

undertaken by the Lutheran Church anywhere in the United States.

In this way our Conference rapidly increased in numbers and extent of territory. Our stakes were strengthened and our cords lengthened. Efforts were several times made to divide Lebanon Conference. But the brethren enjoyed meeting together, every three months, so much, that the trouble and expense of traveling long distances, to and from meeting places, were gladly borne. The members of Conference, at their meetings, realized how good and how pleasant it is for brethren that agree to meet together. They often remarked that conference meetings did them more good spiritually than meetings of Synod.

This Conference also brought a number of brethren into the office of the holy ministry. Some of them were, for a while, employed as "lay readers," and then recommended to the President of Synod for "ad interim license." Rev. W. S. Porr of Lancaster, Rev. J. F. Bayer of Pennsylvania Synod, Rev. J. J. Weber of Ashland, Rev. W. L. Heisler of the Central Synod, Rev. D. E. Reed of Nebraska Synod and others, entered the ministry through the Lebanon Conference. Resolutions and recommendations are found in our minutes, by which these brethren were brought into the great harvest.

Revivals of religion were labored and prayed for by the members of this Conference, from the time of its organization. In the year 1857, five pastors reported, at the meetings of Conference, an addition of 308 new members. The whole Synod of East Pennsylvania does not report

much over twice as many additions for the year 1877. And the report of Synod includes over fifty pastors. In the year 1858, at a meeting of Conference, the following was unanimously adopted, "Whereas, The Lord is now pouring out His Holy Spirit upon many of the churches of our land, in a manner altogether unusual, and

"Whereas, This simultaneous awaking seems such as the Bible warrants us to expect, therefore,

"Resolved, That we as a Conference, recognize in this the promise of a more cordial co-operation among the people of God, and the manifestation of more active effort among individual Christians in establishing the Kingdom of Christ, and that we will encourage our people to co-operate with their fellow Christians of other churches, in praying and laboring for the furtherance of this great work." Revivals of religion have built up the Lebanon Conference. All its members have been faithful in the catechising of the young; but they have labored and prayed for the indispensable increase from Heaven upon their work.

The education cause has also always received much attention from the Lebanon Conference. Suitable young men were sought out by its members, and encouraged to enter our institutions of learning. This is another reason why it has been so successful.

The Lebanon Conference has always stood up for the right unanimously. The great questions of the day, which came up during its long and interesting history, were never avoided, but boldly met in the name of the Lord.

This Conference always placed itself on the right side. In the great struggle through which the General Synod passed at Fort Wayne, every member of this Conference was faithful. There has never been a Galesburg Rule man connected with this honorable body. In its christian and apostolic atmosphere such an exclusive and selfish spirit could not have lived, even one moment.

In the Great Rebellion this Conference was always on the side of law and order. In a report that was made on the state of the churches in the bounds of this Conference, in the autumn of 1863, we find the following recorded on the minutes. "No one who has listened to these reports, failed to observe the fact, and it is one we are proud to record, that the ministers of the Lebanon Conference, to a man, are on the side of the Government in this great struggle between liberty and slavery, and are unanimous in the opinion that 'silence is treason.'"

In regard to the cause of Temperance this Conference has always put itself right on the record. All through the minutes of Conference, resolutions are recorded, where the members pledged themselves to do all in their power to prevent the use of intoxicating drink as a beverage. In the efforts that have of late years been made to destroy the Christian Sabbath, the members of this Conference show by their recorded resolutions that they are very decidedly on the side of God's unrepealed law, on this subject; "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

The work of twenty years, performed by the members of Lebanon Conference, shows that they have always stood

up for Jesus and his Kingdom. And the time will never come when they, or any of their descendants, will have to hide their heads in shame for any of their actions in this Conference.

A marked improvement in the transactions of Lebanon Conference, of late years, is the publishing of a programme and the timing of the readers and speakers. This measure put a check upon those who occupied more than their share of time; and gave something to do to those members, who formerly formed only a part of the audience. It improved our meetings in every way.

The Lebanon Conference has been a great success. Very much labor has been performed by it for the Master. The blessing of God has rested, in abundant measure, upon the pastors and congregations. And the memories of those who have enjoyed the privilege of being members during a part, or the whole, of its existence, are full of green spots. We hope the future may be as bright and useful as the past has been. We, a part of us, will still be the Lebanon Conference. The hive, as some think, has become too full. We send of a young swarm. We bid them God's spread. Our past days of friendship will never be forgotten.

We are not all here to-night; but in twenty-two years God has not often called any of our Conference away by death. Bros. Crumbach, Gotwalt, and Suesserott, all of St. Johns, at Lancaster, Bro. Berlin of Tremont, Bro. Ehrhart of Pennsylvania College, Bro. Yeiser of Schuylkill Haven and Bro. Croll of Lyons Station; these seven — a sacred number — the Lord has taken from the Church

militant, in our midst, to the Church triumphant, in Heaven. They were all very devoted and successful in their labors for the Master, and ripened early for Heaven. Perhaps their spirits are hovering near us to-night as we are met in Conference, where they formerly delighted so much to be, while on earth.

God has done great things for us as a Conference. Let us dedicate ourselves anew to His service, to-night, as we surround His table on which are placed, for us, the emblems of his broken body and shed blood.

Let our motto ever be, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord." And let us determine, that, by the help of God, we will know nothing among the people, "save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

